



News Release

For Immediate Release
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Disfigured Baseball Star Warns Against Smokeless Tobacco Use *Cancer survivor challenges youth to enter UDOH anti-tobacco contest*

(Salt Lake City) – How could a former athlete’s face inspire thousands of kids ***not*** to dip into a can of snuff? At age 13, Gruen Von Behrens became addicted to smokeless tobacco; at 17 he was diagnosed with cancer. One week later, surgeons removed most of the lower half of his face.

The TRUTH continues to “Fight the Ugly” effects of tobacco by bringing Von Behrens to Utah high schools August 25 through 29. Von Behrens, a former high school baseball star, tells his painful story in an effort to dissuade youth from using tobacco.

“With a batting average of .400, my goal was to play for the Chicago Cubs,” says Von Behrens. “Instead, thanks to smokeless tobacco, I’ve spent much of my life in hospitals and endured more than 40 surgeries and countless other treatments. Spit tobacco ruined my life and I don’t want this to happen to anyone else.”

While in Utah, Von Behrens is challenging youth to enter Real Noise, an annual contest that invites junior, middle and high school students and their friends to create and conduct an anti-tobacco activity in their communities. Entries are due by November 21. More information is available at www.fighttheugly.com.

Contests like Real Noise, where youth tell others about the dangers of tobacco, have helped bring Utah’s youth smoking rate down to 7.4 percent—the lowest in the nation.

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Von Behrens will be speaking at these locations:

Monday, Aug 25

8:10 a.m. – Enterprise High School, (TBD)

1:00 p.m. – Beaver High School and Milford School, (TBD)

Tuesday, Aug 26

8:15 a.m. – Clearfield Job Corps, 20 W 1700 S, Clearfield, Utah

9:30 a.m. – Clearfield Job Corps, 20 W 1700 S, Clearfield, Utah

Wednesday, Aug 27th

8:30 a.m. – Carbon High School, 750 E 400 N, Price, Utah

Thursday, Aug 28th

9:15 a.m. – Horizonte School, 1234 S Main Street, Salt Lake City, Utah

1:20 p.m. – Grantsville Junior High School, 318 S Hale, Grantsville, Utah

In Utah, 4.9 percent of high school students use smokeless tobacco, which contains 28 carcinogens. It can lead to gum and heart disease and increase your risk for cancer of the esophagus, pharynx, larynx, stomach and pancreas. Users get four times more addictive nicotine from smokeless tobacco than from smoking cigarettes.

Gruen Von Behrens is part of the National Spit Tobacco Education Program, working to let youth know that smokeless does not mean harmless. For more information visit www.fighttheugly.com or call David Neville at 801-538-6917 or 801-386-1316.

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.